

Feline Influenza

What is influenza?

Influenza, or flu, is a highly contagious viral infection that can infect both people and animals. Although there is no strain of influenza specific to cats, three strains of flu have been found in wild and domestic cats and there may be others.

What kind of flu could my cat have?

The three types of influenza viruses that have been found to infect cats are:

- **Highly pathogenic Avian Influenza (H5N1):** This variation has been linked to consumption of infected poultry.
- **2009 novel H1N1:** This type was confirmed in a single cat from Iowa in November 2009. Two out of the three household members reported recent influenza-like illnesses prior to the cat developing respiratory signs.
- **2016 H3N2:** This type is more commonly found in dogs. Most cases in cats have been linked to shelter situations where there is an outbreak among the dogs.

How common is influenza among cats?

Reported influenza infections in cats are rare. Other animals such as ferrets, pigs or poultry are more susceptible to influenza viruses.

How are influenza viruses transmitted to cats?

Influenza viruses are typically transmitted through large infectious droplets from a cough or a sneeze. This is most likely how cats or other animals are exposed to the virus. However transmission of H5N1 avian influenza from birds to cats is through consumption of infected birds or contact with infected bird droppings.

What are the signs of flu in cats?

Cats experimentally infected with influenza can have signs similar to people including fever, listlessness, runny nose, congestion, excessive salivation, conjunctivitis (i.e., swelling and redness of the membranes around the eyes) and occasionally death. These signs can be encountered in cats with other diseases, so contact your veterinarian if you have concerns about your pet.

Can I get the flu from my cat?

Transmission of influenza viruses from dogs or cats to people has not been documented. People are more likely to get the flu from another person than from a pet.

Can my other pets get the flu?

Novel H1N1 has been reported in two pet ferrets and more recently in a dog. H3N2 can infect dogs and there is a vaccine available.

What should I do if I think my cat has the flu?

If your cat has difficulty breathing you should contact your veterinarian and if you or someone in your household has recently been ill with an influenza-like illness let your veterinarian know that as well.

How can I prevent my cat from getting novel H1N1?

To prevent transmission of novel H1N1 influenza to your pets:

- Cover your cough or sneeze
- Wash your hands frequently
- If you are feeling ill and have flu-like symptoms, avoid close contact with your pets such as nose to nose contact.

Additional Information:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov)
- [Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine](http://www.cornell.edu/vet)
- [Minnesota Board of Animal Health](http://www.mn.gov/animalhealth)

This fact sheet is meant to provide basic information. For specific health concerns please contact your physician or veterinarian. Updated May 2016.